

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend claims 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 18, 19, 24 and 25 as indicated below.

1. (Currently Amended) A method of preparing or modifying a cheese or cheese-like product comprising mixing into a cheesemaking mixture or ~~[[a]]~~ product, a heat-killed ferment of an exopolysaccharide-producing-microorganism without separating the exopolysaccharide from the other components of the ferment.

2. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the heat-killed ferment is directly mixed into a cheesemaking mixture.

3. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the heat-killed ferment is mixed into an ingredient used in making the product.

4. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 ~~any one of claim[[s]] 1 to 3~~ wherein the heat-killed ferment is ferment prepared using a lactose-rich medium and an exopolysaccharide-producing-microorganism.

5. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 ~~any one of claim[[s]] 1 to 3~~ wherein the microorganism does not hydrolyse lactose, and the ferment comprises an added lactase or galactosidase enzyme or an organism which produces an enzyme which hydrolyses lactose.

6. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 4 wherein the medium contains more than 1.0% (w/v) lactose.

7. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 4~~[[5]]~~ wherein the lactose-rich medium is a fraction of milk.

8. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 7~~[[6]]~~ wherein the fraction is serum or mother liquor; or raffinate or breakthrough derived from milk or skim milk or buttermilk or whey or serum or mother liquor or permeate; or permeate derived from milk or skim milk or buttermilk or whey or serum or mother liquor or raffinate or breakthrough.

9. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the microorganism is a food-acceptable microorganism.

10. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 8 wherein the lactose-rich medium comprises a dairy permeate.

11. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 10[[9]] wherein the dairy permeate is a milk permeate or a whey permeate.

12. (Currently Amended) A method a claimed in claim 1 ~~any one of claim[[s]] 1 to 10~~ wherein the microorganism is selected from *Xanthomonas compestris*, *Sphingomonas paucimobilis* and lactic acid bacteria.

13. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 11 wherein the microorganism is selected from *Xanthomonas compestris* and *Sphingomonas paucimobilis*.

14. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 11 wherein the microorganism is selected from *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* ssp *bulgaricus*; *Lactococcus lactis* ssp *cermoris*; *Lactococcus lactis* ssp *lactis*; *Streptococcus salivarius* ssp *thermophilus*; *Lactobacillus casei* ssp *casei*; *Leuconostoc mesenteroides*; *lactobacillus helvitiis*; *Lactobacillus reuteri*; *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*; *Lactobacillus plantarum* and *Lactobacillu sakei*.

15. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 ~~any one of claims 1 to 13~~ wherein fermentation is conducted at a temperature of 20-35°C.

16. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 14 wherein the fermentation is incubated for 16-240 hours.

17. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 15 wherein the mixture is fermentation incubated for 60-120 hours.

18. (Currently Amended) A method a claimed in claim 1 ~~any one of claim[[s]] 1-17~~ wherein the ferment is heated and spray dried.

19. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 ~~any one of claim[[s]] 1-17~~ wherein ferment is heat-killed and mixed directly with a dairy product.

20. (Original) A method of modifying a milk protein concentrate comprising adding to the concentrate a heat-killed ferment of an exopolysaccharide-producing-microorganism without separating the exopolysaccharide from the other components of the ferment.

21. (Original) A method of preparing a cheese or cheese-like product comprising the steps of

(a) adding to a cheese milk, a heat-killed ferment of an exopolysaccharide-producing-microorganism without separating the exopolysaccharide from the other components of the ferment;

Appl. No. : Unknown
Filed : December 28, 2005

- (b) adding a proteolytic enzyme to the mixture;
- (c) collecting the resulting curd;
- (d) further processing the curd to produce a cheese or cheese-like product.

22. (Original) A process of preparing a cheese or cheese-like product comprising the steps of

- (a) providing a cheese precursor mixture comprising milk proteins
- (b) adding to the cheese precursor mixture a heat killed ferment of an exopolysaccharide-producing-microorganism without separating the exopolysaccharide from the other components of the ferment
- (c) providing conditions under which the product gels.

23. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 22 wherein the conditions of (c) are provided by cooking the mixture to denature milk proteins and allowing the mixture gel.

24. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 ~~any one of claim[[s]] 1-23~~ wherein the product is a cheese.

25. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 ~~any one of claim[[s]] 1-24~~ wherein the product is a processed cheese.